The Online Challenge: Why Not Teach Music History Unconventionally?

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Several years ago I overheard a conversation by a few senior colleagues who were deriding the concept of teaching music history online. Their objections likely resonate with many of us: "I have to be there to guide my students through the listening experience;" "class discussion is essential;" "how will I know what they're learning?;" "music is a human endeavor;" "they'll just cheat;" etc. Yet for each justification that my colleagues were enumerating, a relatively simple technical solution existed. I was intrigued, and so I decided, as a challenge, to try authoring and teaching an online music history course.

As someone who has taught primarily full-time undergraduate students in a four-year, university environment, I was also curious about the broader role of online teaching within the landscape of higher education at large. When the *New York Times* reported on the "Classroom of the Future" four years ago, 3.5 million college and graduate students, or approximately one out of five, had already taken an online course.[1] Those numbers have increased in the intervening years. Most of the growth is happening in community colleges, for-profit institutions, and state institutions that have a mandate to serve a non-traditional population. Thus, higher education already has shifted toward more courses, including music courses, being taught online by *someone*. As I considered my colleagues' general attitude toward online teaching and obvious lack of willingness to try it, I was also motivated by the realization that we—the larger community of active music scholars and university-level educators—might have a professional interest in getting more involved.

What follows are simply my personal experiences teaching music history and music fundamentals to music majors, minors, and non-majors in an exclusively online environment over the past seven years. Following a brief overview of my institution's pedagogical format for online teaching, I discuss the positive experiences and the negative experiences that I have encountered throughout the process. I will conclude by exploring two questions. The first is: our students are getting their music, listening to it, reading about it,

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1. "Classroom of the Future Is Virtually Anywhere," *New York Times*, October 31, 2007.

researching it, and discussing it online already. We cannot stop that. So how are we, as professional music educators, going to interact best with our current and future students, their technologies, and their methods of communication? My second question is: what is it about our physical presence in the classroom that actually matters when it comes to students learning?

My one caveat is that I am not an advocate for online teaching *per se*, and I have no intentions of converting any skeptics to undertake a virtual class. I happen to like being in a physical classroom; it is one of the reasons I entered this field, and one of my greatest professional joys. I would never abandon teaching in a conventional, face-to-face classroom. As with any teaching opportunity, I believe instructors must be both comfortable and confident in their teaching environments. Thus, for anyone who is certain that online music instruction will not work, I would never suggest that instructor should try it, because with that attitude, failure is assured. Nonetheless, I believe these discussions should take place and that we all have much to learn from exploring the various pedagogical possibilities. On that front, much of what I have learned in my online teaching has also enriched how I approach my face-to-face courses.

Course Format

My experience teaching online courses has been at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), in a liberal arts college and department of music within a large, Research-I State University. Both full-time UNC undergraduates and non-matriculated, part-time students can take these Music Department courses, but they are administered through a continuing education office. On a student's transcript, there is no indication as to whether the student took the course online or the conventional classroom. In other words, once students have completed the course, their academic records do not list the instructional method for the course, and the documentation of their experience is identical.

As an instructor, my first task was to translate the course—including my lectures, in-class activities, listening activities, students' experiences and elements of participation, and all assessments—into an online format. The parameters under which I had to work included:

1. Minimal tech requirements for the students. UNC aims for low-tech delivery wherever possible so that we can serve North Carolina residents who live in remote areas and have limited access to technology.
2. Weekly written lessons, with required discussion board participation for the students. These are supposed to be the educational

equivalent of what the students would get if sitting in a classroom face-to-face each week.
3. Adherence to a rigid template for the written lessons (which served as the content-equivalent of lecture notes).

Once I began that process, I got in touch with my assigned instructional designer. At UNC, these full-time course-design professionals provide an interface between the instructor and the technical aspects of the course delivery. They provide both a service and an extra layer of review in the process of designing a course that we do not have in our conventional classroom teaching. My instructional designer handled the website coding. But my instructional designer also edited the content of my lessons to comply with the online teaching templates. For instance, each lesson had to have exceptionally detailed lists of outcome goals, as well as an executive summary of the learning points for that week, with both an overview and main objectives pulled out in bulleted lists. Any questions and prompts that I asked as part of the assignments or discussion boards could only pertain to material that had been explicitly covered in that or previous lessons. For instance, a discussion prompt that always gets great responses in my classroom but that got rejected from my lesson plans asks the students to compare certain aspects of pop musicians' careers from the 1960s, which we were studying that week, with what they know about today's pop musicians. The instructional designer challenged it because the lesson didn't actually teach anything about today's musicians—I was assuming (apparently too boldly) that my students might draw on external experiences and bring them into the discussion.

My second task was to figure out how to make this a sonically rich *music* class. This task involved visiting with UNC's legal counsel to come up with a strategy for providing streaming audio of the recordings while still complying with copyright law. Once the legal issues were ironed out and the proper security in place for the websites, I embedded live audio, video, and in many instances, sound clips that I created myself in the course site. I sang examples, played various illustrations at the piano, created Finale files to generate some audio examples, and overdubbed commentary on particular moments in a recording. And then the semester began.

The Positives

Since 2005, when I began teaching online courses, I have found four major positive outcomes. One is that I have had a more diverse group of students than I have encountered in my conventional classrooms. They range in age from high school seniors to retirees, and include working professionals, single parents, foreign students, students who are traveling with church ministries,

athletes training for the Olympics, and a host of other interesting people who bring their perspectives into the discussion boards.

The second positive outcome has been that it is easier to coach all participants into having a voice in the class, even though those voices are expressed via text. The discussion board has room for everyone, and everyone is *required* to use it. Quiet students cannot duck the conversation, and, conversely, those who are full of hot air cannot fully monopolize it. Online discussions are a great equalizer in another respect: students' voices in class are based exclusively on what they write and contribute. Thus, classmates and instructors are not swayed in their responses to each other by the myriad factors—including biases and judgments—that come into play with face-to-face interactions.

The third positive experience is that all of the instructional designers and course templates have encouraged me to be even more aware of and attentive to defining the desired learning outcomes for my courses, both online and in the conventional classroom. Clear and focused goals, outcomes, main points, and lesson plans are always useful, whatever the medium of instructions. That's just good teaching practice in general.

Finally, online classes mean that students are reading, and writing, a lot more. These students are processing large quantities of prose regularly, and are then forced to express themselves more thoroughly through their writing. In the online environment, their peers will challenge incomplete ideas or incoherent explanations, because all students are also required to respond to their classmates' discussion-board posts. There is no question that they get lots of writing practice in these courses, and that is an invaluable skill for any college student.

The Negatives

All that attention to learning outcomes and quantifiable assessment, however, can have downsides if not handled carefully, whether in online or conventional classroom formats. The attentive instructional designers often trim out supplemental learning that might be considered tangential to the primary lesson objectives. In my face-to-face classrooms, by contrast, we end up in discussions before, after, and sometimes during class that are thoughtful avenues of inquiry and that benefit and enrich the student's overall experience even if not in my formal lesson plans. Most of those moments grow out of shared experiences that provide an impetus for further thinking among all students. We might hear a recording being played down the hall, or all hear a classmate's unusual solution to a question posed in class, or discuss something from that day's student newspaper, because we're all in the same space and have a shared environment on which to draw. Those moments grow into learning opportunities for my students. I can easily recall from my own days

as a student that some of those tangential discussions provided the richest experiences I had in college. Those sorts of conversations can *and do* happen in the discussion boards online, but only rarely, partly because the shared experiences from which to draw are very few and far between, and because of the asynchronous nature of the online course.

I am also intrigued by how students approach online lesson materials and how that relates to what I call the "journey of discovery" in a course. Some of these observations are further supported by my own experiences taking online courses or certifications as many professional colleagues do regularly. I have taken two in the past few months: one was my Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA, certification. The other was my required refresher Institutional Review Board, or IRB, certification. In both cases, I had a series of online lessons to read and study, then a test at the end that I had to pass with a certain score. There are obviously many readily available strategies for getting these sorts of certifications done quickly, and not all of them line up with best practices for sustained learning. For instance, one might check the "outcome assessments," executive summaries, and list of main points to cover, then skip ahead to the questions and assignments, then backtrack to the main text and run electronic searches through the prose to identify only those bits that relate to the assignments and questions. Those sorts of strategies are extremely effective for passing the quizzes, but likely not what the authors of those courses had in mind when they composed elegant prose and thoughtful, subtly reasoned arguments to persuade their readers' thinking. In other words, we can't control how the students are interacting with our material, other than by writing sophisticated and subtle prompts and questions. While online courses allow the students to work at their own pace, that sometimes means faster, not slower, than the classroom equivalent might be.

Most of my negative experiences in online teaching actually have nothing to do with the course format and everything to do with the politics and policies surrounding online teaching. I'll briefly list three additional ones. The first is the "cost" myth. The notion that online teaching is cheaper is pervasive in the popular press. Yet the North Carolina General Assembly recently commissioned a report on online teaching and distance education that found the actual cost of offering a course was almost identical, online or in the classroom.[2] This survey covered fifteen different schools in North Carolina, not just UNC Chapel Hill, and took into account infrastructure costs, instructor costs, and administrative overhead. Online was actually a tad more expensive. Furthermore, the survey found that the start-up cost for launching a new course was almost identical online or in the conventional classroom.

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2. Program Evaluation Division, North Carolina General Assembly, "University Distance Courses Cost More to Develop Overall but the Same to Deliver as On-Campus Courses," Final Report to the Joint Legislative Program Evaluation Oversight Committee, Report Number 2010-03, April 28, 2010, http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/PED/Reports/Topics/Education.html.

The second negative is that online students are often pulled from demographics beyond the regular student body, something that proponents tout as a benefit of the format. At UNC, my face-to-face classroom students have much in common. They all earned admission to UNC, which reflects a certain standard of prior education and demonstrable academic performance, and have met various requirements, including completing a basic first-year English composition course. They all have the same resources for academic support: UNC has 24-hour tech support to help with their laptops, a professionally-staffed writing center, walk-in access to a major research library, professional academic advisors, and access to free tutoring through the music service fraternity, for instance. All of the students also have access to the same intellectual and artistic community: guest artists, concerts, lectures, and even local bands become resources outside my classroom. And while they have different academic schedules, many of the students are nonetheless together with peers in other clusters of courses, whether it is their studio classes, their theory, history, and musicianship courses, or their ensembles.

By contrast, my online students are often lacking in all of these areas. The basic requirement for admission to my online course is completing one's junior year of high school, and paying a fee. That's it. No minimum SAT score or particular demonstrated academic preparation or competency is required. The university allows, and individual advisors often encourage, students who have lost academic eligibility to take online courses to try to raise their GPA. Students who have been denied admission to UNC can take online UNC courses to build a transcript to re-apply. Students who have never had a college writing course of any sort can enroll. Students whose English language skills are barely functional often enroll. Yet, with this diverse and often woefully unprepared student body, I cannot send my online students to some resources such as the university's writing center (to which non-matriculated students usually do not have access) or to the library (as they are often far from campus), or use local artistic events in the syllabus. While there are solutions and strategies for one's pedagogical approaches in all of these areas that I use, the bottom line is that while the students' transcripts may not indicate any difference between the educational experience of the online student and the face-to-face student, UNC's university policies certainly treat online courses differently in terms of population, resources, course designs, and learning experiences.

The third negative experience comes from the "consumer attitude." When students sign up for an online course, they write a check or hand over a credit card specifically for that course's fee, and then have the sense that they have purchased college-level knowledge, whatever that may be. The profit-driven nature of the online teaching enterprise—even at a state university—means that administrators are highly attuned to the quality control of their product. This leads to useful instructional designers, lesson templates, and other

regulations for online teaching. However, this situation ironically negates many of the potential benefits of online learning. Educators often tout that online learning allows for non-linear explorations and far-reaching connections, for webs of information and ideas, and for individualized pathways of discovery. Yet the for-profit online teaching enterprise often shoehorns the courses into more rigidly *linear* forms, thereby undermining some of the potential benefits.

Let me emphasize that none of these issues are intrinsic to the notion of online classes in the first place, but rather are related to sometimes self-contradictory policies that surround the research university's entrance into this educational marketplace. None of these is insurmountable, either, and effective coping strategies can be readily employed for all of them. I and many of my colleagues who do teach online courses have developed ways to either compensate for or minimize their impact on the courses, but I point them out as illustrations of the challenges and negative experiences that have arisen in this journey.

Final Reflections

After seven years of teaching online college-level music history and fundamentals courses, I am convinced that online teaching is neither better nor worse than conventional face-to-face classrooms, but rather, fundamentally different. Bright, motivated students thrive in these classes, and I have gotten to know many of them as personally and deeply as the students who sit in front of me every day. But let me return to the two questions I posed at the outset of this essay. The first is how do we connect with students in an online age? Our students are already in an online classroom environment of their own making. They just happen to sometimes be sitting in the same room as us. I keep a count of how many e-mails I receive versus how many students stop by office hours in person, and it will likely come as no surprise that the ratio is around 100:1. I believe that we are already teaching at least partially online when we interact with our students through so many electronic media on a regular basis—but we seldom think of it that way. My answer to the question is that we have to explore the ever-changing arsenal of online delivery tools and interactive media, and continually evaluate and implement them with as much creativity and follow-up as we can. Meanwhile, we should acknowledge the irrevocable aspects of online teaching that have appeared in our face-to-face instructional models, while simultaneously getting involved in the inevitable online music instruction that will happen with or without us.

My second question is one that I freely admit I'm still pondering: if we set aside our egos, what is it about our physical presence in the classroom that actually matters when it comes to student outcomes? Part of the answer, I believe, is in the emotional connection with another human being, where

tone of voice, body language, and general empathy for another creature of the species opens us up to deeper and more attentive learning. I estimate that my online courses generally cover only four-fifths as much as my conventional classroom courses. The difference comes, I believe, from the tangential explorations that the instructional designers trim away, and from the rich academic and mentoring relationships that open up through human interaction. I consider, for instance, that for the American Musicological Society/Society for Music Theory conference in Indianapolis, where I first presented this material, we all flew to Indianapolis, and I stood up in the conference room to talk about this instead of just posting my notes online. That is something that I will continue to ponder as I design and refine all my courses, both the in-person and the online ones. In conclusion, I invite us all to examine these issues, reflect on our own experiences, and test out new ideas that might fit in today's educational landscape in our upcoming discussion, and to continue these conversations, both in person and online, in our professional work.

Discussion

Abbreviations of speakers in the discussion are listed in the introduction to the Roundtable on p. 40.

Oversight of Content and Web Design
P1: I'm disturbed that you have to work under the aegis of professional web developers who help to determine not just the design but also the content of your course. This feels very much to me like other people telling us to do with our music program. I know that on my campus this is not the way we structure online teaching. We have a lot of web designers and technology offices that are extremely willing to not only give us grants to develop our online courses and to help us develop our content, but they are hands off in the details of the content. I was wondering how true this is for the rest of you. If you do online teaching at all is your content dependent on these technology editors?
JN: If this course were not being run by the Distance Education Office, I would not be dealing with Instructional Designers. These are not interfering people by nature, and they are not telling me about topics, facts, and answers. They are basically checking for consistency and boundaries. And they are very thoughtful, nice, and cooperative people. But according to UNC guidelines, it is officially no different from my Department Chair checking my syllabi; it's just that most department chairs don't check what I'm doing for each and every assignment. But I am also curious about what experiences other people have had.

P2: My music appreciation class just went online and has web content that had to be approved by my Chair and by my Dean. So if there was content that they felt needed to be changed then I would meet with them. The Continuing Education Department at my school is hands-off on content, as long as you follow some basic guidelines. You have to have course objectives and actually meet them. But my Chair and my Dean are the only ones who see my content in that kind of detail.

P3: This semester is the first time I put a course online and nobody checked the content of my course. I think our campus Learning Technology Center will look at the content at the end of the semester because I am trying to get a certification for teaching online courses, but if I didn't want to get that certification, no one would check the content of my class. We don't have course designers, we don't have web people—we just do our thing. And I think technically we are probably way behind other schools in many ways. I had to spend most of the summer trying to figure out how to include musical examples in quizzes online. So having some help from an external web design team would have saved me a lot of time.
JN: I learned a lot from the UNC team of instructional designers. They have a lot of professional expertise; web design and course delivery is what they study and research. And I actually like some aspects of their oversight.

Academic Honesty
P4: You never addressed the issue of cheating online. Were you going to say anything about that?
JN: I can try to regulate it; I have some guidelines from our University Honor Code regarding what you can and cannot expect students to do. But I have to figure out what I want students to learn and then how I make sure they are accomplishing that as honestly as possible. I figure they have access to fact-based resources, so I try to ask questions to see if they are thinking about the resources and if they have processed the resources, rather than just checking whether they have learned facts. A lot of my grading is based on their writing on the Discussion Boards each week in response to prompts and questions that I ask them. Cheating is an issue with my online classes, but it's an issue in my regular classes as well. I know I have students occasionally cheating in the classroom. I teach a big class, I teach a lot of non-majors, hundreds of students. I know that I am missing some of the high-tech cheating methods, low-tech cheat sheets, glancing over at smart neighbors, you name it. It happens. I think online the challenges are different, but they are not completely foreign. No one can control cheating everywhere, but I try to make sure that the students are learning as honestly as possible whether in the classroom or online.
JB: The statistics on in-class cheating would scare the pants off you. Something like 70% of undergraduate students said they have bought a paper in

their four years, either buying from an online service or hiring your roommate to write it. So there is a lot of cheating in general on campus.[3]

Video Conferencing

P5: I was wondering if anybody has used video conferencing as part of an online class and if so what was the success?

JB: The virtual seminar is kind of cool. I did it because I wanted to cross the Atlantic. There were students in Europe who wanted to take this course, and so we had to meet early in the morning to deal with time change. We actually met like a regular seminar; we all met around our screens. The good products have been designed by companies who have 60,000 employees around the world and they want to be able to have a teaching seminar.

Since you often only see people's heads in small groups, you miss some of the body language. In an online seminar you have to learn how to read different kinds of cues and decide when you are going to buzz in or not, but it was a lot like a regular seminar. Except in terms of diversity you can have people from all over the world participate.

My prediction is that we are definitely going to see this for small enroll-ment classes. If you only have two students who want to take this course on Josquin, but they there are two student in the next county or the next country that want it, or in the entire state of North Carolina that want it, some legisla-tor is going to figure out that rather than having three of four different courses, we can have only one course simultaneously. We are going to see this kind of thing more often. I think it worked more like a regular seminar, except that we didn't go for coffee afterwards. Someone suggested we all take our computers to our own coffee shops . . .

JN: Let me add that a real low-tech solution is to use Skype. We've used it a lot when we don't have money to bring someone physically to campus, and it has worked fine.

JB: That's a great use of this technology if there is someone you want your students to talk to or see who is not local, the Skype option works beautifully for that.

P5: What program did you use for a ten-student seminar?

JB: There are a few. One used to be called Breeze; Adobe has bought it and it has a new name now.[4] It has a maximum of 65,000 simultaneous users, which

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3. http://education-portal.com/articles/75_to_98_Percent_of_College_Students_Have_Cheated.html. See also Donna Stuber-McEwen, Phillip Wiseley, and Susan Hoggatt, "Point, Click, and Cheat: Frequency and Type of Academic Dishonesty in the Virtual Classroom," *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 12, no 3 (Fall 2009), full text available at http://www.westga.edu/%7Edistance/ojdla/fall123/stuber123.html, and Donald L. McCabe, Linda Klebe Treviño, and Kenneth D. Butterfield, "Cheating in Academic Institutions: A Decade of Research," *Ethics & Behavior* 11, no. 3 (2001): 219–32, full text available at Google Books.

4. http://www.adobe.com/products/adobeconnect.html.

is a scary thing to imagine 65,000 people in your class at once—lots of little boxes on your screen.

Class Time and Student Preparation
P6: I teach at a small liberal arts college, and we're selling the classroom experience to our students and their parents. So we are not going to be pushing distributed learning because that is not what we do. But I have to think about what I provide in the classroom (three hours a week) that is the best thing to do in the classroom and what can I move on to the course site that is the best thing to be online so they can do it from their dorm rooms. I'm not teaching across the state; my students are all living on campus. I still get a lot students coming into my office, because I am always there, and they are always on campus. But I still want a clear idea of what I can do in my classroom time and what I can move online with all the technology we have.
JB: I think that is the next big question for those of us who teach at residential institutions: "What is the best thing to do with my students' class time and out of class time?" I think you've asked the question we are all going to be asking constantly for the next twenty years, because people are going to be looking for the extra value there.

I think in general it is going to be the face-to-face interaction in smaller groups. One of the things I tried last year is that I got rid of all the large lectures in a class of about 150 students. I didn't meet with all 150 students ever. I podcast the big lectures and then met with them in groups of twenty. So my time was used differently because I wanted to lead discussion, which I couldn't do with 150, but I could do with twenty. But I would do it once a week with a different group and I would rotate the groups.
MC: When I first started using online course system (such as Blackboard) one of the things I did was to move as much administrative stuff online as possible, because I didn't want to carry around extra copies of the syllabus and all the handouts—mainly for practical reasons—convenience and access.

What I think is the most interesting thing that José and Jocelyn both talk about is the way in which engaging with technology keeps our own attitudes as teachers fresh. The scariest thing, actually, is to stop lecturing, because then what do you do with this critical time. When you have that physical presence how do you maximize that?

At least for me, the models I had coming up as a student were all lecture based. The people I think of as the great, engaging teachers I had in the past were the amazingly dramatic, theatrical, Shakespearean orators who had everyone in the class hanging on every word. It's disturbing sometimes when you take the risk to create these interactive exercises and you have to step back off the stage. You feel like you are not doing what you're supposed to be doing as a teacher. I'm paid to be *the* presence—the center of the students' attention; I'm paid to be there in the classroom. It is satisfying for us to be there and to

get that kind of performance boost. I'm a bassoonist and I found the same charge doing a recital as in giving a great lecture—it's exciting. But when you drop lecturing from your teaching or create the opportunities to drop that, the real challenge is what do you do then?

I think using podcasts and finding ways to deliver content, especially the more mechanical and repetitive parts (the module you have on sonata form or whatever), creates a challenge of what you can do inside the classroom to build on that and enhances the out of class work. I think the thing that is always driving me is what students get out of the class—they may get an A out of the class, but if they can't remember it six months later or five years later what have we accomplished? And so with the *Living✲Music* project, the fact that they can remember it five years later, the fact that it was dramatic enough to transform what they are doing, makes it worth all the effort to make that happen—even the sacrifice of class time that would otherwise be used to deliver content.

Some of our biggest concerns are questions like, "What are my colleagues thinking? Am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing as a teacher if I am stepping back from giving lectures?" What drives me is the notion of impact. If I feel that I am not making a difference what does it matter? The questions you are asking are essential. Technology challenges me and gives me the extra time in the classroom to do something interesting, and then I learn from that.

JB: I have two things on the opposite ends of the spectrum. On the one hand the things you can do outside of class that give you more time in class. My favorite idea was one I got from a junior colleague who gives a syllabus quiz every semester. "There's a syllabus. It's online. There is a quiz that is due before the next class." And it's a quiz on Blackboard that covers the things you want them know about the class, and they get a couple of points for the quiz. That frees up a half an hour. I'm also a big fan of sending an e-mail a day, or a Tweet, or posting something on Facebook—especially if it goes to their phone. Because you can say, "There is this thing happening right now that is relevant to what we just talked about in class. This makes me think about our discussion this morning." It models a behavior of scholars who are engaged in the material outside of class. But you can also use it to remind them, "And we're going to talk about this tomorrow. Did you finish the reading?" And you can do this as a whole class and can get people thinking that they can be always thinking about the class and there is stuff going on out there that relates to the class. I connect with students outside of class at least once a day.

But on the other end, one of the greatest teachers I ever had was Joshua Rifkin, who came in the first day of a class on Bach's cantatas and talked about Bach and the parts and all that. And at the end of the class he said, "OK. I'm done. For next week these are the cantatas I want you to look at." And he came back the next week and said, "OK, what do you have for me?" And then he sat there for twenty minutes of silence. We were like, "He really meant that

we were supposed to try to figure stuff out and come in and talk?" After twenty minutes of silence he said, "Next week I'd like you to look at these other cantatas and we'll discuss them next week." It was one of the bravest things I had ever seen. Next week we were all prepared. Sometimes you have to do those dramatic things. Sometimes I judge how well the class went by how little I had to say. That is a very different sort of model and it is very hard.

Guiding a discussion is a different kind of skill than lecturing or grading papers. And there is some interesting research on the best kinds of questions to ask.[5] Some of it is obvious, such as don't ask yes or no questions. But open questions are also poor, "What do you think of Beethoven?" That's a lousy discussion question. So you've got to give students a controversy or dilemma and some scope to disagree, but narrow enough so certain things are excluded. Designing those sorts of questions is very hard. And figuring out what assignments they are going to do in class is the big question.

P7: The earlier recommendation of doing one podcast and then the next year doing another relates to this discussion of what are we going to do with the extra classroom time. If you have a class that is mostly lecture, take a module or two a semester and try doing that section without a lecture and see what happens. Don't try to convert the entire course into a brand new format.
MC: I think that is a great suggestion—to pace yourself. You have to do things you are comfortable with as a teacher. Some of it is stretching our own comfort zone. I remember the first time that I had a great class where I didn't say anything—I was bummed. I thought the students were brilliant and I hadn't participated, that I wasn't the source of the learning, and it was disappointing. It has taken me a while to get comfortable so that I see that kind of class as the successful class (where I am not talking), rather than the successful class being the one where I am the authority figure, and the class confirms my own sense of responsibility. There is an emotional component to moving more things online, and it is worth attending to.

P8: I've started teaching a rock history course, and YouTube is such a great resource. But have any of you had the experience where you feel like you are tipping too far into the direction of using clips of interviews of performances in class and felt that these were things the students could be doing on their own? Do you have recommendations for teaching when there is so much live material out there?
MC: That's an interesting question. Yes, you can easily do too much. And then students can start to resent it when new technologies are constantly intruding on them. I do have contentious objectors in my courses who will

5. For example, Sandra Edwards and Mary Ann Bowman, "Promoting Student Learning through Questioning: A Study of Classroom Questions," *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* 7, no 2 (1996): 3–24.

not do online listening quizzes. And they will choose to take the hit on their grade. (I should probably do some interviews with them to see what is going on.) I think there is a real overload issue. We talked about gradually transforming a course; you have to take something away. If you are going to add an online YouTube video or other homework component, it has to replace a reading or make the reading shorter. When I first started teaching online it was easy because I was ahead of all my colleagues. These days I feel like it's pretty ubiquitous on some level. And so students are constantly being asked to do all this extra electronic stuff, and if it just overlays on top of what we traditionally do it will destroy the learning opportunity because students are just overwhelmed and don't engage with the material.

P8: I was asking more about things in class. If you decide you are going to talk about someone and you see all the great live interviews with the person and I wonder if I am letting YouTube do too much of the teaching in class. I'm choosing the examples, but that is not what I want to be doing as a teacher.

MC: I think the key is to deliver the facts outside of class, so you have the time in class to indulge in the discussion.

Group Projects

P9: I'm teaching a music appreciation course this semester and it went through the same process it sounds like Jocelyn went through, with our campus Distance Learning Center helping me design the class. But one thing they insisted on was that I have a group project. I am just at the time in the semester when we are going to do this and I'm thinking of using GoToMeeting.com or Adobe Connect so they can present their projects. And I'm wondering if you had any experience with team projects online and how successful are they?

JN: Our guidelines were actually the reverse. We wanted to be sure that the person who is isolated with a slow Internet connection and no ability to do live chat is OK in the class. So my only group interaction has been some Wiki projects, which have been small-scale versions of the things Mark talked about with response and blogging on a Wiki and discussion. But we have kept away from more technologically sophisticated group work.

When Technology Fails

P10: One of the institutions I teach at is extremely small and about a month ago I was getting onto Blackboard and the whole server experienced a failure. And I know larger institutions may not have these problems, but at this one small school we have these problems with the basic technology from time to time—e-mail, course website, Blackboard—and then my students can't turn in work on time, and I have to extend deadlines, and the whole class gets behind. I would love to incorporate technology in this class. The students seem to

possess the technology, but I was curious if you have any advice for backup or something that would be useful when everything derails.

JN: Everyone has probably had a bad teaching moment where the technology fails. Let me answer this from two different directions. One is institutional—a lot of these resources at the large institutions are incorporated into the school's infrastructure. So we're lucky at UNC that we have an excellent Internet infrastructure. That doesn't mean things don't crash, but it does mean we have a dedicated office 24/7 of high-tech support staff who are there to fix it. I report things immediately, even if it is 3:00 in the morning and follow up on the progress of the solution.

The second perspective is that I have to be a tech geek if I'm going to do this. You sometimes hear, "Oh, the instructor doesn't need to know any of the technology side." But my answer is, "No, you've got to be willing to learn a lot of it." Seven years ago, UNC did not have a streaming media server, so we put up our own (although it has since been replaced by a centrally administered one). We still use a lot of what looks like low-tech and open-source solutions because then we don't lose our resources when the budget crashes and the university stops subscribing or contracting with any one particular service. So I believe it is smart to experiment on the front edge of technology but rely on the back edge of technology. You should learn a lot of the technology yourself. And also employ old-fashioned back-up systems: create a reliable backup of your gradebook; keep a physical piece of paper with your students' contact information. Continuing some of those old-school, low-tech methods allows me the freedom to play on the front edge of technology.

MC: At the University of Michigan I haven't had to worry about this for a long time. When I was first starting doing a lot of tech stuff, it was a challenge and I did have some problems with the media server that the School of Music operated not being available for a quiz. One of the things I've certainly learned, especially doing the custom blogs, is that you have to create the system in such a way that the students can work without the instructor necessarily being there all the time. So the system that turns the musical examples on and off, for instance, is automated; there is just a due date and the system searches for musical examples that fall within those parameters. When I first started doing things I put the assignments up manually each week. And if I got delayed or didn't put it up incorrectly, the students got very frustrated. They expect a 99.9% usability rate for online things, and if you fall even 2% short they consider it a disastrous system that is never working. So the margin of error in online materials is actually very narrow.

The other thing I would do in your situation is try to use Google as much as possible. Create an e-mail address for the course that is course-number@Gmail.com; you can just sign up for that account and have it forward the mail to your central e-mail account. If you are working at multiple

institutions try to create your own infrastructure. Google's free and they have a huge staff to maintain their systems because their brand identify is closely linked with reliability and precision. So maybe if you've had problems with a specific institution you might try to find your own way around it.

JB: One of the things I've found is that our Tech Support people are sort of lonely. Faculty members generally are afraid of them or ignore them. And so when you do go to them with a specific challenge it actually engages them and justifies their salary. They are usually incredibly responsive, and so I've been able to do some things I would have never imagined without having that support staff. I think in more recent years they are a bit more overburdened than initially, but I've definitely found that if you ask them questions it is very valuable and the support staff is very helpful—they usually give you more than you expect.

P11: In the beginning of the semester, the students didn't quite understand my instructions for using some of the online components. So they constantly e-mailed me, and I had to re-explain things. I had a lot e-mails with similar questions, so I created a "Frequently Asked Questions" page. And that is one of the things that has helped my students understand the technology I'm using in the class.

JN: I learned early on that if the e-mail was not personal, I could put the e-mailed question on the discussion board with my response, so other students with the same question have the answer available immediately.

JB: I was going to say exactly the same thing. Someone had asked earlier about things you can and can't do online or in person. Because blogging and discussion boards are different than class discussion you should try both in the same class because different students will do different things. A kid who is shy and sits in the back—if you force him to do something online you discover, "Oh my gosh, this is a very intelligent and thoughtful student who is just a little shy." And suddenly they are stars in the online discussion board but they will never say anything in class and vice versa.

When I first started using online technology my colleagues would say, "Well, we have to teach them to talk; you can't actually have a life online." That was before blogging and no one thought you could spend your whole life putting posts on webpages. Have students answer questions from other students themselves on the discussion boards. It's like the airlines—they say if one person complains they probably had 100 people who wanted to complain but just didn't get around to it. So if one student has a question there are probably other students who have the same question but didn't get to your office hours. So when a student comes to my office hour with a question I post that too (anonymously, I don't use the student's name). The more you can build that into the course and make a repository you can reuse the better. So it's not just an e-mail, but also something that you post to the course page

and attached to the lecture. The next year when I am about to do the same thing I have a note saying there was a specific problem and I can plan on how to head that off by talking about it in class. It can serve as a reminder to me that I did not do a very good job of explaining topic X.

E-mail etiquette

P12: I have a question about using e-mail? My students are increasingly using e-mail in place of face-to-face discussions, especially for situations I feel an e-mail is not appropriate, such as an excuse from class. I'll get an e-mail after a student has been absent such as, "Sorry I missed class, but I had a death in the family, or my car broke down, or something else." I've had to put in my syllabus that if a student wants me consider an absence from class they have to come speak to me in person. My sense is that students are using technology in place of developing personal skills they should be learning in college—how to speak directly in person about important issues. Is this just the culture that we have or is there a way around this?

JB: I think it is the culture that we have. There is a much lower barrier to e-mail than there is to visiting you in your office. Students feel more comfortable writing an e-mail than they do coming to visit you. That is the culture and I'm not sure what we do about it. I do feel some obligation to encourage to students to express their ideas in class in front of others, to have that personal time, because we do have students who spend all their time behind a screen and they will if you let them. Obviously in an online environment that won't work for person-to-person communication, although I do use the telephone. It works for students who are low tech. I leave a message and ask them to call me.

JN: I recall that when I first started teaching, I naively didn't know about the number of students whose grandmothers were all going to die right around an exam, or how the students might use e-mail, and I didn't have my policies stated clearly enough. For me, the potential anonymity of e-mail is one problem; I have gotten outrageously rude e-mails from students, sometimes without their names attached and from addresses that I can't trace. One policy I now state in my syllabus about e-mails is that students have to sign their first and last name, which is the tiniest first step to addressing this issue of civility in e-mails.

MC: I've rarely had this problem and I'm typically just glad students have tried to contact me at all. You also use your office hours at the start of school (when no one is coming to your office hours anyway) to assign students the task of coming to your office hours so you get to know them and they know where your office is. It is more rewarding to me and I can tailor class discussion more if I know the students better. E-mail is a barrier, and the convenience of it can be addictive to both the students and faculty.

JN: That reminds me about how different our classes and teaching situations are. If I have 700 students, that is not going to work. If the students are across the state and never coming to campus, that is not going to work. No single solution fits every situation.

Concluding Comment

MC: I wanted to point out that there might be professional issues about teaching online for the American Musicological Society to start thinking about now. There may be a time when the pressure to teach online will be used as a lever against raises or to get more work out of faculty for less pay. Potentially if you have one master teacher at the state's Research-1 institution, what does that mean for the staff at satellite campuses? We need to consider how technology can enhance the art of teaching face-to-face and that the personal aspect of teaching stays in the forefront of our discussion of being a good teacher. So when an administrator or politician comes and says, "Why am I paying for all these teachers of the same course? Why are we paying for all these branch campuses?" we as a Society have something coherent to say in response.